HEADLINE:

BYLINE:

KICKER:

QUOTE:

ANGLE:

CONTENT TYPE:

WORD COUNT:

DATELINE:

At the busiest part of Bulawayo city center, Xolisani Ncube and the rest of his counterparts who call themselves *amavikelambuso* are holding placards written among other things, 'Bring back our Jobs and 'No to nepotism and corruption'.

They are demonstrating against alleges that a Shona speaking manager of a popular chain supermarket fired Ndebele speaking employees and instructed them to go to South Africa and get jobs there. Ncube says among the demonstrating activists are unemployed trained teachers and nurses.

Next to them are the riot police, watching closely as they sing and threaten to enter the supermarket.

While the activists are fighting against nepotism and regionalism in the employment sector, their actions are a representation of a macro-struggle in Zimbabwe of a dysfunctional economy and high unemployment.

The upcoming elections on July 30 could as well be about the economy. Every Presidential hopeful is promising to turn around the economy and most importantly create jobs. A widely accepted term for the state of the economy is that Zimbabwe has become a 'vending nation' with no formal employment available for the 30 000 graduates churned out each year at the country's tertiary institutions.

For some politicians and ordinary citizens, if Zanu PF wins this election- the economy is doomed and there is no hope for any improvement in job creation.

The Inter-censal demographic survey (2017) released by Zimbabwe Statistics (ZimStats) reports that 6.6% of the 5.6 million economically active Zimbabwean population is unemployed. (CQ LINK) This is far cry from the figures circulated in local and international media which quoted this rate at 95%. Of note however is the fact that this report includes people in the informal sector with little or no living wage.

Zimstat uses the International Labour Organisation's broad definition of employment, which liberally takes into account informal economic activity.

Tendai Biti, a former Minister of Finance under the 2008 government of national unity says the Zimstats figures are a farce and every credible agent reports that 95% of the population is unemployed. He says a win for Zanu PF will mean an exacerbation of the current unemployment crisis and a continuation of the current crisis.

"Zimbabwe needs a fresh start, not 38 years of sterility and mediocrity. There is self-evident decay and malaise which we need to get rid of."

MDC Aliance under the leadership of Nelson Chamisa intends to build a $100 billion dollar economy through increased productivity which creates employment. They intend to increase foreign direct investment for mining and industrialisation, formalize the informal sector and grow small to medium enterprises. Biti says their reconstruction agenda is key to new employment opportunities.

Timothy Chiguvare, leader of the People's Progressive Party and one of the contestants in the forthcoming Presidential elections, says his party will create 2.5 million jobs in two years if elected.

MDC (T) under the leadership of Thokozani Khupe says they will adopt policies favourable to domestic and foreign direct investment.

Spokesperson Linda Masarira told GPJ, "An MDC (T) led government will clamp down on corruption, re-industrialise the economy through agriculture and mining."

However, others say regardless of the winner, it will take a long time to turn around the country's economic fortunes.

Political Scientist, Eldred Masunungure says dealing with unemployment is the most serious problem facing Zimbabwe today and will be long term project needing a minimum of five years.

"While the unemployment figures are contested, if we take the median range say 50%, it still is too high and any manifesto or politician promising to solve this in a short period is being unrealistic."

Masunungire says unemployment is a structural problem spanning over two decades. Some employees lost their jobs as a result of the fast track land reform programme and can only be employed when the agro-based economy which used to be very large is made productive again.

He says the Zimstats data should be a cause for concern because the quality of work being in cooperated in the data is very low and considered a past time by many.

Page 54 the Zanu PF manifesto says: “In the 2013 People’s Election Manifesto, ZANU PF promised to create 2,2 million jobs. Over the past five years, 4,5 million have been gainfully employed in new jobs in both the informal and formal sectors, with agriculture, mining and manufacturing contributing over 80%.”

Masunungire describes this as grossly inaccurate while Biti says its absolute nonsense.